

Naval Aviation Holds 2nd Annual Safety Summit



Vice Adm. Kenneth Whitesell, Commander, Naval Air Forces, gives remarks during the flag panel of the second annual Naval Aviation Safety Summit alongside (from left) Rear Adm. John Meier, Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic; Rear Adm. Rich Brophy, Chief of Naval Air Training; and Rear Adm. Christopher Engdahl, commander, Naval Safety Command; in San Diego, May 9, 2023. More than 500 attendees involved in safety, maintenance, and aircraft handling across Naval Aviation gathered to build upon lessons learned to enhance the culture of safety and discuss the current state of the safety environment within the Navy and Marine Corps. (U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Aron Montano)

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SAN DIEGO – Commander, Naval Air Forces (CNAF) hosted the second annual Naval Aviation Safety Summit in San Diego, California, May 8-9. The event brought together safety experts, leadership and supervisory Sailors to discuss safety process improvements to protect the U.S. warfighting advantage—namely, people and platforms.

More than 600 attendees involved in safety, maintenance, and aircraft handling across Naval Aviation built upon lessons learned over the past year to enhance the culture of safety throughout the Naval Aviation Enterprise (NAE). Vice Adm. Kenneth Whitesell, CNAF, and often referred to as the Navy's "Air Boss," kicked off the Summit by discussing the current state of the safety environment within the Navy and Marine Corps, inviting the audience to learn from the speakers to

“get better” on safety. He added that the Safety Summit was critical to achieving a collective warfighting advantage.

According to Whitesell, the purpose of the Safety Summit was to explore safety-related concepts and ideas currently working for other communities and turn those results into outcomes for Naval Aviation to reduce the damage to platforms and to protect Sailors and Marines.

Whitesell reflected on maintaining the operational capability of the “Air Wing of the Future.” He also stressed the importance of gathering leaders, experts and “the flight line” together to discuss what is working, what is not and how initiatives are implemented to strengthen Naval Aviation today and in the future.

“The kids that are joining the Navy now are the same ones that will be the lieutenant commanders, the captains and the next Air Bosses, and they are going to be the next petty officers and chief petty officers who will lead the Navy over the next five, ten and even fifteen years, as they work their way through their careers,” said Whitesell. “This is a critical moment for us to understand our business, to understand where we are from a safety perspective, and where we can combine the safety and the operational sides of the house.”

Safety-related experiences and perspectives were also shared from the U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Army, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard and FedEx commercial aviation.

On the summit’s last day, a flag panel question-and-answer session was held with Whitesell; Rear Adm. John Meier, Commander, Naval Air Force Atlantic; Rear Adm. Christopher Engdahl, commander, Naval Safety Command; and Rear Adm. Rich Brophy, Chief of Naval Air Training (CNATRA).

“As conditions change, it is incumbent on us to change the

controls,” explained Meier. “Those conditions may be the experience of the workforce; it may be the workforce’s capacity; it may be the weather, the non-skid, you name it. My focus is on the controls. We measure success not by the absence of a mishap but by the presence of the controls.”

Guest lecturer and author Dr. Tim Ludwig addressed dysfunctional practices that degrade work culture and what to do about them. Ludwig has over 30 years of experience in research and practice in organizational behavior management. In that role, he has helped assess, design, and implement behavioral safety and quality improvement programs for more than 50 companies worldwide as well as worked with Naval Sea Systems Command and Naval Information Warfare Systems Command. He also discussed how to develop systems to optimize employee performance by building upon the best safety behaviors and analyzing the behavior context.

Dr. Steven Spear, the author of the book *High-Velocity Edge*, discussed how to execute high-performance evolutions safely during high-risk operations. Troy Mueller, Director Nuclear Technology Division, Naval Reactors, who spoke at the first Safety Summit last year in Norfolk, Virginia, returned to share safety improvement approaches for the NAE to consider and adopt.

Other Naval Aviation experts provided presentations on topics including the year in review, command resiliency programs, and recently initiated safety programs across Naval Aviation. One of those programs involves CNATRA’s overall progress with Bird/Animal Aircraft Strike Hazard commonly called BASH—efforts implemented across all training locations to keep student aviators and instructors safe as they train.

The Naval Aviation Enterprise is a collaborative warfighting partnership where Naval Aviation leaders leverage their assigned authorities to deliberate and resolve interdependent

issues across the whole of Naval Aviation to provide combat ready naval air forces to the fleet.